

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 4th Sunday Advent Year B

I'd like for us to step right into this conversation we hear today between the angel Gabriel and Mary. Sometimes that happens accidentally, that we bumble into other people's conversations. Has that happened to you lately out in public? Not long ago I was standing in front of the canned fruit aisle of a grocery store, looking for cherries. I knew people were around me but I hadn't really examined each person, and I heard "What is the difference between natural juice and syrup here?" So I just started talking, "I've been told syrup has a lot of added sugar; but natural juice would too" and then I turned to see a lady holding a cell phone with her finger up. She told somebody on the line, "Oh okay I'll get three cans then." She wasn't talking to me, but what did I know? I just smiled because to say anything more, would just have interrupted her more. But that was conversation I tried walking right into. We can think now, of all these webex and zoom situations we see a lot of on TV, where interviewers and respondents just talk all over each other. My suggestion is that we get cue cards with people's names on them to flash when it is their turn to give input. But I think today's reading begs us to get in on the conversation with Mary and Gabriel. It has several messages in it for us.

First, we see how amazingly detailed God's providence is; that God can line up so many factors and events to synchronize and pull together His Will. Seeing the details should be a great trust-confidence builder in God's care for us. If we doubted God was concerned about minute details in our lives, today's gospel says, "Yes, God has it worked out to the tiniest piece." Luke 12: 6-7 has Jesus telling us this to ponder: "Are not five sparrows sold for two small coins? Yet not one of them has escaped the notice of God. Even the hairs of your head have all been counted." So how detailed is this announcement of Gabriel today? Let's look at it:

When does this happen? 1:26 "In the sixth month, (who?) the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town (just any town? No-) of Galilee (which one specifically) called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin (Oh? unmarried young girl) betrothed to a man (and surprise-she is already engaged to a specific man to whom this news will be a surprise TOO) named Joseph, (and Joseph has important Jewish connections) of the house (some royal lineage) of David, and the virgin's name was Mary (she too is personally named). I suggest that such specific detail is meant to increase our faith that absolutely, Yes God is in control. Gods knows what He is doing! His providence has it covered; yes especially so when we cooperate, but even if we don't, (our loss big time) His will still finds it way around us to accomplish His ends and fulfilling His intention-shows glory! The proof of providence is in the details, if God has worked out this scenario so finely tuned, then we need to get into its line too.

A second message comes about with the example of Mary's perfect trust that God will provide; somehow-someway. She ends the reading with her proclamation, "I am the handmaid-(servant) of the Lord, may it be done to me according to His Word" (Lk 1:38). I

love Mary's practicality in her reaction to Gabriel. From her response, I know Mary is a woman I want to be around, and God willing and with grace, to try to imitate. She knows how things get done; and wants to be active part in accomplishing it. What I mean is that for her to be so reflective, pondering and meditating so much in other places of the gospels, she lasers in on the practicality of Gabriel's message (about the virgin birth to be). I know because it is her (her flesh-body) that the Holy Spirit will be conceiving in), so she feels it, but out of all the incredible detail that Gabriel speaks, she keeps it basic asking "Me conceive? You know I haven't had relations?" To which Gabriel goes on "Oh, leave that to the Holy Spirit. He will take care of you overshadowing you in His wing, and the Spirit has been busy, as you will discover about your kinfolk Elizabeth & Zechariah". I guess I am so struck by Mary's response, she kind of skips over the immense specter of world history (all the stuff that leads to vanity and pride-she ignores all that, to stay focused on 'and how exactly may I serve you Lord?') Gabriel dropped the dime and let her in on how 'world saving' and once and forever popular this child would be when he said her child would be "Son of Most High' & 'He'll take the throne of King David' & "Rule over the house of Jacob" & "A never ending Kingdom". I'd have some questions about that; but Mary is so humble to not be a bit concerned about the history of the World forever being changed by her actions. I see that as a sign of her 'devout willingness' to serve Her God, yet she wants to make sure it can happen practically, as if to say, "I want to help; I'll do anything to serve; but, you know I am only engaged at this point." Until, it dawns completely on her; which comes I think when she immediately rushes to Elizabeth's side (who at an advanced age-she's at risk expectant mother) Mary confers and ministers to her (as she said, a handmaid serves!) So practical is Mary, and so trusting that she knows that God will work out all the details. She need only act in faith. The Holy Spirit will lead, and tie together all the rest. So, in the final days of Advent, as we prepare for Christ's coming again, we can feel trust increase, and confidence grow in us, that God will see us through; we need only be willing/follow like Mary, putting ourselves at the service of others (sometimes very practically-down to earth). So how can we be like her in these last days (but every day too) before Christmas? Maybe as simple and practical as carrying bags/ packages for other people, getting fruit down off the shelf for them, doing the dishes, not causing any extra grief, being a little more patient with others, and being a little Christ for each other. If we let Jesus into our hearts more and more, we can be servants to each other like Mary is for us!